

VZCZCXYZ0001  
PP RUEHWEB

DE RUEHGB #0526/01 0591457  
ZNY CCCCC ZZH  
P 281457Z FEB 10  
FM AMEMBASSY BAGHDAD  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 6876  
INFO RUCNRAQ/IRAQ COLLECTIVE PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L BAGHDAD 000526

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR NEA/I

E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/27/2020  
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [KDEM](#) [IZ](#)  
SUBJECT: RRT ERBIL: KURDISTAN ISLAMIC PARTY LEADERS ON  
ELECTION ISSUES AND BARZANI WASHINGTON TRIP

Classified By: RRT Erbil Team Leader Andrew Snow for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (U) This is an Erbil Regional Reconstruction Team (RRT) cable.

¶2. (C) Summary. The Ambassador,s Senior Advisor to Northern Iraq (SANI), RRT Team Leader, and RRT staff met separately with Salahaddin Bahauddin, leader of the Kurdistan Islamic Union (KIU) and Ali Bapir, leader of the Kurdistan Islamic Group (KIG). Both complained bitterly about the ruling parties, perceived abuses. They are suffering from campaign violence, and expect voting fraud. Like many Kurds outside the predominant KDP and PUK, they regard President Barzani,s recent trip to Washington as a &family trip8 rather than an official visit on behalf of the KRG. Bahauddin also predicted that Masrour-Nechirvan rivalry will eventually lead to a serious split within the KDP. End summary.

Barzani Trip to Washington  
-----

¶3. (C) These meetings, on February 18, were part of a series of meetings that SANI had in Erbil and Sulaymaniyah after President Barzani,s visit to Washington. SANI underscored the importance of President Barzani,s creating personal rapport with President Obama. He also noted Vice President Biden,s message that the KRG will do better getting a piece of Iraq,s entire oil revenues rather than squabbling over the much smaller fields in the three provinces of the Iraqi Kurdistan Region. SANI also went over Secretary Clinton,s message, underscored by Commerce Secretary Locke that the Kurds must act to improve transparency and fight corruption.

¶4. (C) The KIG,s Bapir was less than enthusiastic about KRG President Barzani,s trip, and criticized the President for taking both his son Masrour (KRG intel chief) and his nephew Nechirvan (former KRG PM, and currently invisible as &deputy head8 of the KDP). In his view, if President Barzani wanted it to be more than just &a family trip8 he should have taken Prime Minister (and PUK member) Dr. Barham Salih. KIU leader Bahauddin acknowledged the trip as a significant sign of USG respect for the Kurds, but was similarly critical. He complained that details of the visit were closely guarded by the Barzanis, feeding rumors of a family plan being worked secretly with U.S. officials and/or U.S. companies. Bahauddin was also critical of the make-up of the delegation saying that it is important to see things from the point of view of the opposition and that Barzani should have taken with him someone from one of the 20-plus opposition parties represented in the Kurdistan Parliament

Critique of Ruling Parties:  
-----

¶5. (C) Bapir brought up the subject of PM Salih,s draft KRG

budget, saying that, during a recent parliamentary debate, KIG MPs asked why oil and electrical revenues were not included. They received no reply. More broadly, he took the leaders of both the KDP and the PUK to task, saying that they not only control government money, but also dominate a large number of companies (including some with monopolies in certain sectors. Bahauddin lamented both a lack of progress in merging the two wings of the Peshmerga ) a process which, crucially, will also entail cutting ties between these military units and the two predominant Kurdish parties ) and what he sees as similarly troubling delay with the unification of the two separate boards of audit. He painted a detailed picture of an IKR still far more dominated by the traditional big two parties. , than many non-Kurds realize, Qtraditional big two parties. , than many non-Kurds realize, adding that even President Barzani does not see the whole truth.

#### The Election:

¶6. (C) Bapir is himself running as a candidate. He said that he wants to go to Baghdad and present a different image of the Kurds than the KDP and PUK present. He complained that the Kurdistan Alliance makes agreements without discussing them with the other Kurdish parties. One of his goals in his party platform is to bring Iraq back in line with Sharia law; a plank that he believes will attract Turkoman voters.

Bapir observed that it is not good when the various factions in Iraq seek guidance from foreigners, adding that Iraqis could solve their problems themselves if they stopped listening to outsiders.

¶7. (C) Bahauddin, a more polished and sophisticated analyst,

emphasized that his party represents Islamists who have adopted democracy. While not giving numbers, predicted an increase in electoral support compared to the 2005 election. He added that the KIU is branding itself as permanent competition to the Kurdistan Alliance.

#### Built-in Fraud in IHEC:

¶8. (C) Both Islamic party leaders voiced concern over the likelihood of fraud during the election. Bahauddin cited past examples in outlining how the two ruling parties in the IKR have always used electoral fraud to get ahead. Bapir stated that because his party is religious they will not cheat; but those who can cheat have the ability to use the Assyrian. He asserted that the KDP and PUK even have the ability to manipulate IHEC by placing party members in key positions. He said that the head of IHEC used to be head of the KDP office, and that the KDP gave this individual a piece of land. He went on to say that this is important because that person had a large role in the fraud that happened during the July elections. By his account, when IHEC extended the voting an additional hour by making an announcement on election day itself, it enabled the KDP and PUK to stuff the ballot boxes. He claimed that 20% of the votes counted in July were received in the last hour, when the larger parties moved groups of voters from place to place having them vote more than once by using pre-printed forms that allowed last minute registration.

¶9. (C) One of Bapir's KIG lieutenants added that the people in charge of the voting centers are all either KDP or PUK. While the person in charge in each center is supposed to be chosen by lottery among the election center workers, the names of all non-KDP/PUK members are removed before the drawing. The KIG has written a memo to IHEC seeking an explanation, but have not received an answer.

#### Security Concerns:

¶10. (C) In the last several elections there have been multiple violent incidents targeting both the KIG and the

KIU;; however there have been no prosecutions, let alone convictions. During this election there has already been one incident involving shots fired at the KIU office in a small town in Suleymaniya Province. Bahauddin said police responded and caught the perpetrators. He believes there is an organized network behind that attack and the widespread destruction of KIU posters. Bapir expects problems, but said that so far in this campaign the KIG has not had any. He claimed that in the July elections it was the Assyrians themselves who attacked the KIG office, adding that the people in the neighborhood around their offices are not against the KIG.

Bahauddin Predicts KDP Divisions:

¶11. (C) Bahauddin offered a thoughtful analysis of the current state of the KDP, concluding that what happened to the PUK\*i.e. a major split ) will in time happen to the KDP. In fact he believes the KDP is already on the verge of a schism but, unlike the PUK/Goran split, the KDP split will occur inside the Barzani family. He observed that former Prime Minister Nechirvan Barzani is not happy with his current pseudo-position, but is waiting to see how the election goes before making any move. He described a burning personal rivalry between Nechirvan and Masrour ) who are first cousins and brothers-in-law ) that is much more intense than it appears from the outside. Both would like to inherit the Presidency, and each regards the other as the one to inherit the Presidency, and each regards the other as the one obstacle potentially blocking that ambition..

Comment

¶12. (C) Bahauddin and Bapir,s view of KRG President Barzani,s recent visit to Washington as a &family trip<sup>8</sup> is widely shared in the IKR, especially in Sulaimaniyah. In part it reflects the way Iraqi Kurds have traditionally viewed their leadership. While basic democratic principles (especially electoral participation) are widely and enthusiastically accepted, the Barzani family has a quasi-royal status that transcends any expectation that the leadership might be peacefully changed. Barzani leadership of the KDP and preeminence in the KRG is expected to extend into the next generation, even by PUK members and members of small opposition groups that wield little influence beyond a narrow base of adherents. Bahauddin,s lurid portrait of

looming conflict between Masrour and Nechirvan cannot be dismissed, but their rivalry is likely to remain in check as long as Masoud remains healthy and firmly in control. Both the Islamic parties and the Goran (Change) Movement have long asserted that the extension of voting hours in July facilitated large-scale PUK and KDP fraud, and that the ruling parties were able to infiltrate their loyalists into management of the polling stations. The continuing violence between the ruling parties and security forces, on the one hand, and oppositionists on the other, makes it likely that KIU and KIG predictions of more electoral violence over coming days will be fulfilled.

HILL